



**FINAL REPORT**  
**CROATIA: POLITICAL PARTY BUILDING, LOCAL GOVERNANCE**  
**AND CIVIC FORUM PROGRAMS**  
**USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00**  
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## **I. SUMMARY**

During the period April 1995 to June 1998, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted programming in Croatia designed to support the long-term development of a multi-party political system and an active civil society. The Institute worked to achieve these goals through training and technical assistance in political party building, local governance, civic organizing, election monitoring and voter education.

In a political environment dominated by the autocratic Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), NDI's political party building program was designed to promote the institutional development of parties across the political spectrum and to strengthen links between parties and the general public.

Prior to the 1997 local, municipal, House of Counties<sup>1</sup> and presidential elections, NDI assisted nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in organizing a nationwide voter education and election monitoring effort. This civic work lay the foundation for the Institute's Civic Forum program in eastern Slavonia, the only area still held by ethnic Serbs at the end of the war. Civic Forum promoted citizen participation in the political process by providing resident Serbs and returning Croats with opportunities to explore democratic principles in a group setting and address pressing issues in their communities through organized civic initiatives. The Institute's local governance program promoted transparency, accountability and citizen participation in local government.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

Since its declaration of independence in 1991, Croatia has faced the dual challenge of creating an independent state and establishing a democratic system of government. Dubbed the "father of the Republic" for having led the country to independence from Yugoslavia, Franjo Tudjman was elected President in 1992 and quickly established a firm grip on state institutions, the economy, the military, and civic institutions, including the media. The war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which dominated the political landscape through 1996, fostered the formation of a

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<sup>1</sup>Though the House of Counties is the Upper House of parliament, the larger House of Representatives is the more powerful of the country's two legislative bodies.

single-party state run by Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and guided by fervent nationalism. In parliamentary elections in 1993, opposition parties managed to gain some seats in the legislature, demonstrating that diversity of political opinion had begun to take root. Following Operations Flash and Storm in 1995, during which Croatia ousted renegade Krajina Serbs, President Tudjman called new parliamentary elections in an effort to regain the HDZ's firm control of the more powerful house of the country's bicameral legislature. Despite the military successes, the HDZ failed to capture the two-thirds majority necessary to pass amendments to the constitution.

In light of reports of President Tudjman's illness and signs that support for the HDZ was weakening, the ruling party did surprisingly well in the April 1997 local and House of Counties elections. Lacking organizational skills and an understanding of how to mount persuasive grassroots campaigns, opposition parties were unable to leverage increasing public discontent with the ruling party into positive election results. In municipal elections, however, opposition parties won majorities in several major urban centers.

In June 1997, Tudjman was easily re-elected President of the Republic with 56 percent of the vote, twice that of his nearest rival. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) issued a statement declaring that "the process leading up to the elections was fundamentally flawed and did not meet the minimum standards for a meaningful and democratic election." The HDZ had monopolized access to the national media, unilaterally made changes to the election law without adequately informing voters, restricted access to voters lists and denied accreditation to non-partisan election monitors despite an aggressive NGO advocacy campaign. Moreover, the voter turnout rate for these elections, at only 55 percent, diminished the credibility of the electoral process and demonstrated a growing political apathy among citizens.

Meanwhile, as the reintegration of eastern Slavonia into Croatia proceeded, the rate of emigration of Croatian Serbs from the region dramatically increased. Many left for Western Europe seeking political asylum, though economic deprivation also played a significant role in the exodus. Despite heavy international pressure, the government made no significant effort to protect ethnic Serbs from human rights abuses or to reconstruct their homes. All citizens of eastern Slavonia, both Serbs and Croats, lacked information regarding their rights as citizens of Croatia and the rules and procedures regulating the reintegration process. This lack of information, together with simmering ethnic tensions, paralyzed civil society in the region. Following an assessment in September 1996, NDI sought to address this situation through a program designed to provide citizens with the knowledge of democratic principles and the organizing skills necessary to hold local officials accountable and develop civic initiatives in their communities.

In early 1998, the Interior Ministry deployed heavily armed special forces to disperse a series of labor protests against the HDZ's economic policies. The spectacle of military hardware and a massive police presence opposing unarmed citizens as they exercised their political rights led to serious criticism of the governing regime from both Croats and the international community. In June 1998, the opposition gained electoral momentum in county by-elections, winning pluralities in all three of the municipalities where the vote was contested. Motivated by these victories, the largest six opposition parties formed a coalition in August 1998 to contest the Dubrovnik county by-elections in October and to launch a joint campaign for changes to the parliamentary election law.

This joint electoral strategy, combined with improved grassroots campaign techniques which party leaders attribute to NDI training, delivered another success to the opposition.

Since NDI's arrival in Croatia in 1994, the Institute has focused its work with political parties on developing their organizational capacity and the extent to which they reach out to citizens in both election and non-election periods. As public support for the HDZ has steadily declined, the challenge for opposition parties has been to transform themselves into vehicles of public participation in the political process that reflect citizens' concerns and represent viable, inspiring political alternatives.

### **III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

NDI's programmatic goal during this period were to: strengthen the capacity of democratic political parties in order to secure a more genuine multiparty system in Croatia; promote and protect the integrity of the electoral process such that the voters' will is respected; increase citizen participation in political processes; and increase transparency and accountability in local government.

To achieve these goals, NDI's pursued these specific objectives:

#### **Political Party Development**

- Parties across the political spectrum are engaged in continuous exchange with the electorate and represent voter concerns and interests in election and non-election periods.

#### **Civic Education and Organizing**

- Public confidence and participation in the election process are increased;
- Ethnic Serb and Croat citizens are informed about electoral issues, their rights as citizens of Croatia and the process of reintegration in eastern Slavonia; and,
- Citizens in eastern Slavonia are equipped with the confidence, knowledge and skills to organize civic initiatives in their communities.

#### **Local Governance**

- Local government officials use techniques to encourage citizen participation in local affairs and incorporate public input into decision-making.

## **IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### **Political Party Development**

NDI launched its political party building program in Croatia following an assessment mission in October 1994. Through a program of training and consultations in such areas as voter targeting and outreach, message and platform development, media relations, membership development, strategic planning and party pollwatching, NDI sought to assist parties in motivating citizens to participate actively in politics. Those party branches that have applied NDI's training in these areas have met with consistently positive responses from citizens and broadened their respective parties' bases of support. At the national level, party leaders have begun developing platforms that represent the shifting concerns of the electorate.

Opposition victories in the February 1993 Chamber of Deputies elections signaled a slight opening in Croatia's political environment. A year later, breakaway members of the HDZ founded a new party, the Croatian Independent Democrats (HND), in an effort to counter the HDZ's attempts to perpetuate authoritarian rule. Following these signs that Croatia's political environment was undergoing its first significant changes since the country declared independence in June 1991, NDI led a survey mission to Croatia in October 1994 to assess the need for and interest in political development assistance. The positive response exhibited by political party representatives led NDI to move forward with plans to initiate a political party building program.

In January 1995, NDI sponsored a three-day seminar in Opatija, Croatia for representatives from 12 parties on strengthening internal structures and external communications. NDI's international trainers then conducted individual consultations with several parties, affording them the opportunity to discuss specific issues of interest in a confidential setting. In June 1995, NDI sent a follow-up mission to Zagreb to assess the impact of the January seminar and further evaluate the parties' training needs. Political leaders rated NDI's assistance positively; they cited specific activities they had undertaken as a result of the program and expressed interest in continued consultations with NDI-sponsored experts on a range of political organizing issues.

Since September 1996, NDI has worked primarily with the following parties: Social Democratic Party (SDP), Croatian Peasants' Party (HSS), Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLHS), Liberal Party (LS), Croatian Peoples Party (HNS), the Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS) and the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS).

### ***Activities***

In August 1995, NDI received funding from USAID to send a full-time resident representative to Zagreb. In September, NDI began providing ongoing consultation to political parties, the leadership of party youth wings and women's organizations in an effort to improve their

organizational skills, management strategies and effectiveness in representing their constituencies. Training for regional party staff and volunteers focused on effective grassroots campaign strategy. In December 1995, NDI sponsored a workshop in Opatija entitled "The Effective Functioning of an NGO," which convened a multi-party group of young political activists from across Croatia. Discussion covered such topics as planning and prioritization of political organizing activities, community outreach and grassroots fund-raising.

Two weeks before the October 1995 elections, NDI sent an international delegation to Croatia to evaluate the pre-election environment. The group's statement received widespread coverage in the European and North American media and highlighted significant concerns with the promulgation and content of the election law, unbalanced media coverage in favor of the government and insufficient technical preparations for the election. NDI's statement formed the basis of the OSCE's pre- and post-election reports, and established NDI as an authority on electoral issues in Croatia. Following the elections, NDI organized two roundtable discussions, both of which received broad media coverage. The first roundtable brought civic leaders, academics and parties from several parties together to discuss all elements of the pre-election and election period. The second brought women representing political parties and civic organizations together to discuss the role of women in politics and how to promote increased women's participation in national political and governing structures. Participants in both roundtables valued the opportunity to discuss these issues in open, multi-party forums.

Throughout 1996, NDI published a series of educational bulletins covering a wide range of political party development issues and provided *ad hoc* consultations to parties in such areas as membership development, external communications and polling. During this period, NDI focused its program activity at the local level, where the political space for democracy building had proven to be much greater.

During the summer of 1996, NDI conducted a baseline assessment of the parties participating in the Institute's program, assessing both the impact of activities to date and the parties' respective strengths and weaknesses. Although NDI had planned to initiate a training-of-trainers program within each of the major parties in October 1996, requests from party leaders for more traditional party-building seminars led the Institute to delay this program component and focus the following months of training on voter contact, volunteer recruitment, platform development and coalition building strategies. In the months leading up to the April 1997 local, House of Counties and Presidential elections, NDI also conducted training on election planning. It is significant that most participants in these election-oriented seminars were receptive to the idea of developing a direct voter contact strategy. While in previous election campaigns none of the parties had employed such a strategy, all participants included time for door-to-door campaigning when developing their 1997 election calendar.

In February 1997, NDI assisted a coalition of women civic leaders on developing an advocacy campaign to encourage parties to include women on candidate lists and to start addressing obstacles to women's participation in politics.

Also in February 1997, NDI deployed another individual to assist with the implementation of the Institute's voter education program in eastern Slavonia (see Civic Organizing and Education section below) and with the training of political party activists on a multi-party basis in election monitoring. At the request of the Coordination of Opposition Parties for the Observing of Elections (KOSPI), NDI assisted with the production of materials on election monitoring and held consultations on the organizational challenge of coordinating eight political parties to monitor 7,200 polling sites. On April 13, election day, KOSPI monitors observed voting in 90 percent of the country's polling sites.

The failure of opposition parties to campaign effectively during the local and House of Counties elections indicated that they had not developed sufficient resourcesB human, technical or financialB to offer voters a real alternative to the governing HDZ. NDI reacted accordingly by launching the "Training of Trainers" (ToT) program envisaged earlier, the purpose of which was to develop capacity within participating parties to train their own activists in all elements of political organizing without substantial outside assistance. Over the summer of 1997, NDI met with party leaders to introduce the program and ask for a formal commitment of participation. The Institute engaged party headquarters by requesting they send representatives to each seminar, host a final training session led by their newly-trained activists and commit to consultations on instituting a national training program within their respective parties. All of the parties in parliament except the HDZ committed to participate by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This document outlined the parties' and NDI's respective roles in the ToT program.

From September 1997 through September 1998, NDI trained a corps of organizers in each participating party on voter targeting and outreach, party infrastructure development, media relations and peer training techniques. Skills acquired in each session were reinforced by specific, related projects that participating branches were required to complete between seminars. These projects included door-knocking efforts, the development and distribution of questionnaires and party newsletters, the drafting of welcome letters for new party members, the creation of media strategies and the organization of local events to boost their respective party profiles. In an effort to facilitate the training of others within each party, NDI produced a manual for participants which explained how to train volunteers and to incorporate materials distributed during all four cycles of the ToT program. In an effort to expose party activists to the work of their counterparts, as well as political leaders, in functioning democracies elsewhere in the world, NDI organized two week-long study missions, to Canada (March 1998) and Northern Ireland (June 1998).

In May 1998, as parties began looking towards parliamentary elections, expected in December 1999 or January 2000, NDI intensified its work with party leaders and headquarters staff.

The Institute's consultations focused on assisting party leaders in developing strategies to increase communication and coordination between the party branches and headquarters during the pre-election period.

## **Civic Education and Organizing**

Following the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, eastern Slavonia, a region of Croatia which had been hotly contested during the war between Croatia and Serbia due to its ethnic Serb majority, was placed temporarily under United Nations control. The peace agreement specified that the U.N. would oversee the return of the region to Croat control. As this process proceeded, both ethnic Serb and Croat residents lacked information regarding the reintegration process and their rights as citizens of Croatia. Following an assessment mission in September 1996, NDI launched a two-part civic program designed to support a peaceful transition in the region and the development of a civil society in communities throughout eastern Slavonia that had been severely damaged by the conflict. The first phase of NDI's program sought to increase confidence and citizen involvement in the April 1997 local and House of Counties elections. In early 1997, human rights NGOs from both eastern Slavonia and Croatia proper came together to form Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG). NDI worked with this coalition to advocate for the accreditation of domestic election monitors and to recruit and train citizens interested in participating. The second phase of NDI's civic work, which began after the elections, equipped both Croatian returnees and ethnic Serbs in eastern Slavonia to use the political process to improve their lives and communities. NDI's Civic Forum program concluded in June 1998; however, NDI's team of organizers opted to continue their democracy education work. With the Institute's assistance, they formed an NGO, the Citizens' Democratic Initiatives Project (CDIP).

### ***Activities***

#### ***Voter Education and Election Monitoring***

In September 1996, NDI conducted a baseline assessment mission in eastern Slavonia to assess political conditions in the area under UNTAES control. The NDI team met with Croatian government officials, opposition party leaders, representatives of the Serb community, local elected officials, media representatives, officials of United Nations Transitional Administration (UNTAES), members of international and indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academics. While the assessment demonstrated that some civic life did exist in the region, regional conflict aggravated by severe economic deprivation and a large number of displaced persons had virtually eliminated pluralistic, participatory citizen initiatives in the region. The assessment team concluded that: 1) citizens lacked objective information regarding the local elections, the first elections in which residents of eastern Slavonia would be able to vote as citizens of Croatia; 2) the elections offered a broad spectrum of citizens a chance to become involved in political life; and 3) opportunities existed for NDI to exert a positive influence on the reintegration process. Accordingly,

in October 1996, NDI placed a resident representative in Osijek to launch a voter education program designed to promote public confidence and citizen participation in the electoral process.

Throughout the fall, NDI worked to identify NGOs interested in conducting election-related activities. In December 1996, with assistance from an American pollster, NDI conducted six focus groups to assess attitudes among Croats and Serbs in eastern Slavonia towards reintegration. Based on the findings of these focus groups, which indicated extreme antagonism among members of different ethnic groups and a general disillusionment regarding reintegration, NDI decided to conduct a narrowly-focused voter education program which did not emphasize organizing across ethnic lines.

In early February 1997, the Coordination for Organization for the Direct Protection of Human Rights, an umbrella organization of Croatian human rights NGOs, held a press conference to announce they were seeking permission to monitor the April 13 local, municipal and House of Counties elections nationwide. Leading members of the coalition sent letters to all relevant bodies, including the Croatian Central Election Commission (CEC).

At this time, although NDI had not initially planned to conduct a civic program in Croatia proper, the Institute decided to invest significant resources in facilitating a nationwide election monitoring effort due to the following factors:

Irregularities in past elections had been met with public complacency; hence, supporting an effort by citizens to monitor their own electoral process would help set an example for the larger public;

Citizen participation in the electoral process would promote the integrity and transparency of the election process, which was consistent with NDI's long-standing interest in supporting the development of democratic processes in Croatia;

The U.N. decision to allow domestic election monitors in eastern Slavonia had raised the possibility that independent observers would be allowed in Croatia proper as well; and,

Even if an advocacy campaign to win the right to monitor the local or presidential elections were unsuccessful, it would likely increase the chance that citizens would be permitted to monitor future elections.

NDI followed a two-track approach with respect to election monitoring. The first track involved working with embassies, multi-lateral organizations and other allies to persuade the government to accredit domestic election observers. In mid-February 1997, NDI convened a meeting of embassy officials in Zagreb to advocate this issue. Simultaneously, a letter-writing campaign was mounted by NDI's Washington office; letters in support of domestic election monitoring were sent to President Franjo Tudjman and the chairman of the CEC from members of the U.S. Congress, the



OSCE and NDI's president. NDI initially considered sending a large pre-election assessment mission to eastern Slavonia, but the high level of international attention focused on the elections in the UN sector led to concerns that the election process would be overlooked in Croatia proper. Accordingly, NDI did not send a large delegation, but rather updated its October 1995 report evaluating conditions surrounding the parliamentary elections. The 1995 report addressed a number of issues that were still relevant, including: a lack of transparency in legal and administrative aspects of the electoral process, unequal coverage of political parties in the state media and a lack of accreditation for domestic election monitors. This report was circulated to interested parties, government offices and international organizations.

The second track of NDI's election-related civic work involved assisting NGOs to organize an effective nationwide monitoring effort in the event that independent domestic observers were allowed to participate in the elections. To initiate this activity, NDI hosted a meeting of interested NGOs in early March 1997 to introduce NDI's approach to organizing domestic monitors. A total of 17 activists from NGOs throughout the country participated, resulting in the formation of a coalition called Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG). GONG's objectives were: 1) to mobilize citizens across the country to monitor the election process as nonpartisan observers so as to enable them to determine the extent to which the elections were free, fair and conducted in accordance with Croatian law and international standards; and 2) to educate citizens about the electoral process in general. GONG established temporary offices in 21 towns to serve as organizing centers and held a press conference to announce its creation. The press conference was covered in all major newspapers.

With NDI assistance, GONG members organized two town meetings in eastern Slavonia, both of which were moderated by the manager of the Center for Peace and Human Rights in Vukovar. Discussion concerned issues involving the voter registration process and citizens' rights as stated in the Croatian electoral law. The forums were filmed, with the participants' permission, and aired on UN television as a means of reaching a wider audience. On evaluation forms distributed at the end of the meetings, many participants indicated a desire to participate in more of such informational events.

NDI helped GONG members to organize candidate forums. These multi-party forums informed citizens about the candidates and platforms of parties across the political spectrum. These events were the first of their kind in Croatia. In late March 1997, NDI conducted election monitoring training for those citizens who had expressed interest in participating. The Institute brought Miroslav Sevlievski, former director of the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR), to some of the sessions to discuss election monitor recruitment.

In addition, NDI helped GONG design and produce two informational brochures: a general guide on how to vote and the rights and responsibilities of the voter, and a brochure on GONG's mission and the importance of voting. A total of 35,000 brochures was distributed by volunteers

before the elections. NDI also assisted GONG members in producing radio and television spots to solicit monitors for election day.

To preempt confusion regarding the admission of domestic election observers inside polling sites in eastern Slavonia, NDI provided all participating monitors in the region with documentation--a letter from General Klein and several sections from the UN Voting Procedure Guide--which granted monitors permission to enter polling stations in the UNTAES region.

Despite a sophisticated lobbying effort, GONG was never granted permission to monitor the elections outside eastern Slavonia. This undermined the organization's ability to recruit and mobilize volunteers. For the local/municipal/House of Counties elections, volunteers who had initially committed to monitoring inside the polling stations were reluctant to monitor outside the polling sites without express permission. During the presidential campaign, people were reluctant to volunteer because the group had been denied credentials for the first elections. Volunteers who monitored outside on both election days were often met with confrontational police who had been ordered not to permit any domestic election monitors near the polling sites; several volunteers were questioned and/or detained.

On April 13, NDI visited polling sites inside the U.N. Sector to monitor voting procedures as well as to support the monitors. The NDI team encountered members of GONG in 13 of 15 polling sites they visited. More than 70 citizens monitored the vote throughout the U.N. Sector. Each volunteer kept an accurate list of the names and contact information of every person turned away from the polling sites, and also noted all irregularities. In many polling sites GONG was the sole organization documenting such information.

On the afternoon of April 13, rumors emerged that voting would be extended a second day to provide all people with Croatian identity documents another opportunity to cast their ballot, even if their names did not appear on the voters lists. Croatian radio made no mention of extended voting hours in eastern Slavonia, and it was later reported that Serb radio, TV and some U.N. communications had been jammed. Despite this lack of official notification, voters in eastern Slavonia who had previously been turned away were informed of the extension of the voting period by GONG volunteers through word of mouth, phone calls and loudspeaker announcements. On June 15, GONG volunteers in eastern Slavonia again monitored voting procedures. NDI visited 18 polling stations to support the monitors.

GONG released formal reports following each election that confirmed the OSCE's negative statements. The reports were distributed locally to NGOs, political parties, government officials, and the media. During the months following the election, NDI assisted GONG in locating alternative funding sources.

## *Civic Forum*

The positive response to NDI's pre-election activities in eastern Slavonia demonstrated that many people in the region were genuinely interested in obtaining accurate information regarding the reintegration process, democracy and the political situation. Accordingly, NDI launched Civic Forum, a civic education and organizing program designed to equip citizens with the confidence, knowledge and skills to organize local civic initiatives and hold their elected officials accountable. In the months following the June 1997 elections, NDI met with NGO leaders, citizens groups and elected officials throughout eastern Slavonia to explain the program and ask for their support.

The Civic Forum program relied on the work of local field coordinators, who recruited groups of citizens to engage in monthly discussions of civic issues that they themselves facilitated. The coordinators worked in teams of two, with each team responsible for 20 discussion groups comprising approximately 10 participants each. NDI hired six field coordinators, an information director and a translator/office manager. Each member of the Civic Forum team worked in or near the towns in which they resided, thereby contributing a unique knowledge of pressing issues in their respective communities. Before the discussions sessions began, NDI conducted a lessons learned training session for the coordinators on group facilitation skills with help from the field coordinators of NDI's Civic Forum program in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The first discussion cycle established rules of procedure for the conduct of subsequent groups. Utilizing democratic rules of procedure provided the groups with experience working within a democratic framework while discussing new information about the transition in eastern Slavonia and democratic processes and principles. Therefore, participants were given the opportunity to regularly discuss and practice democracy.

From June 1997 through June 1998, more than 500 citizens in eastern Slavonia participated in discussion sessions on the following topics:

- 1) Small group organization
- 2) Individual rights in a democracy and as articulated in the Croatian constitution
- 3) Democracy within an election process
- 4) Structures of Croatian government
- 5) The basic elements of a functioning democracy
- 6) Rule of law
- 7) Roles and responsibilities of elected officials
- 8) Citizen participation in a democracy
- 9) Media in a democracy
- 10) Developing a strategic plan for local problem solving

The last session was designed to move participants from discussing democratic principles to organizing citizen initiatives to address pressing issues in their communities. Each group designed a strategy for dealing with a local issue they selected. Participants were encouraged by handouts that detailed numerous successful community organizing projects orchestrated by NDI partners elsewhere in the world. Groups that expressed interest in implementing the plans they developed were invited to participate in the organizing phase of the Civic Forum program. During this phase, NDI's team of coordinators worked with the groups on questionnaire development, issue identification, strategic planning, advocacy, public outreach, volunteer recruitment and building relations with local officials.

Before each new round of discussion groups, NDI conducted a training session for the moderators to review the material they were to present. As the year progressed, NDI encouraged the moderators to take primary responsibility for selecting discussion session topics and developing their own training agendas

To extend the reach of NDI's program beyond its participants and to help link civic groups and NGOs in the region, the Civic Forum staff began publishing a bi-monthly newsletter. The newsletter highlighted civic organizing successes in the region, presented activities of various NGOs' and citizens' associations, and discussed topics being presented in NDI's discussion groups. Newsletters were distributed in both local language and English to participants and international NGOs, as well as media sources.

In early 1998, the NDI-trained organizers voiced their desire to form an NGO to continue Civic Forum's work following the Institute's departure. Accordingly, in May and June 1998, NDI conducted a series of institutional development training sessions for the Civic Forum staff. These sessions covered proposal writing, budget development, problem-solving and management strategies as well as ongoing organizing training. NDI also helped the Civic Forum team reach consensus on their vision and mission statement, brainstorm potential members of their board of directors and research potential sources of funding.

## **Local Governance**

The dominance of the HDZ has stalled the development of not only a multi-party political system and a vibrant civil society, but also of a system of local government that is transparent and responsive to citizen input. Tito-era traditions that vested significant authority in local officials are eroding, replaced by a general consolidation of power. In part, this process has occurred because local officials have been unprepared to assume the role of decision-maker. They do not exchange information effectively or consult with their constituents.

In an effort to address these issues and in response to USAID requests, NDI conducted a local governance program from August 1997 to June 1998 designed to promote transparency, accountability and citizen participation in local government, primarily by fostering a two-way

dialogue between local officials and their constituents. The April 1997 local elections provided a unique opportunity for NDI to begin this work at the local level.

### ***Activities***

In May 1997, NDI conducted an assessment of programming opportunities in the field of Croatian local governance. The team met with county and city officials in four major cities as well as local government experts in Zagreb. Because NDI's existing program focused on political party building development with an emphasis on voter outreach, the assessment focused on researching the state of citizen outreach and public participation at the level of local government. The assessment concluded that there was broad interest in an NDI program that would work with elected officials in promoting public participation in local government initiatives and in using their elected positions to demand more accountability from the executive authorities in local public administration.

Accordingly, in August 1997, NDI deployed a resident representative to conduct a training program promoting collaboration among community leaders, NGOs and local government officials in addressing local issues.

Based on their large populations and status as regional centers, NDI selected Pula and Osijek as the program's two target cities. NDI worked with local government officials to select a pressing issue in each city around which to focus the training program. Officials in Pula selected traffic congestion and the need for increased use and maintenance of public transportation, while officials in Osijek chose to address the issue of drug and alcohol abuse among the city's youth.

NDI recruited local officials, NGO leaders and interested citizens in both cities to form working groups responsible for developing potential solutions to their respective issues, identifying other potential partners and creating a schedule of activities to achieve their objectives. With NDI assistance, these groups conducted surveys and focus groups to determine levels of citizen support for various courses of action. The Institute brought an American media expert to Croatia train city officials in both cities on developing and implementing issue-based communications strategies with the help of civic actors.

## **V. EVALUATION**

### **Political Party Development**

#### **Objective:**

- Parties across the political spectrum are engaged in continuous exchange with the electorate and represent voter concerns and interests in election and non-election periods.

NDI's program trained more than 500 activists representing 12 political parties in all aspects of political organizing. Program participants developed and distributed more than 15,000 questionnaires soliciting citizen opinions on a variety of relevant political and social issues. Party activists went door-to-door for the first time to determine public opinion on political and economic issues, with considerable success: they gathered useful information about voters' priorities, as well as their location, and increased membership by offering citizens who had never been approached by party activists an opportunity to become politically engaged. Twenty-five branch offices organized local activities to stimulate debate on issues about which citizens had expressed concern through the parties' questionnaires.

As a result of NDI's Training of Trainers program, each party that participated now has among its active membership a large corps of trained political organizers and party building trainers. The presence of these activists signifies an institutional capacity to organize party activities that involve direct voter contact and stimulate membership growth. Moreover, these organizers have been trained to train others on such topics as voter outreach and developing effective radio, TV and print media campaigns for local events.

Consistently high levels of participation and continuing requests from parties for more NDI training indicate that they have found the party building program useful. Local branch successes in boosting membership through such outreach techniques as door-knocking has made party leaders less resistant to trying new campaign and platform development tactics. It is significant that parties are increasingly using the information gained in their outreach efforts to shape the policies they advocate. Their emphasis over the last two years on pocketbook issues, such as welfare, pensions and healthcare, represents a radical shift from the once-predominant focus on state security.

Finally, the participation of youth and women in NDI's party building program steadily increased during the period covered by this report. This increase represents party leaders' heightened awareness of the importance of women and youth involvement in broadening the base of their parties, and has contributed to these groups' confidence that political organizing skills will equip them to make significant contributions to their parties.

### ***Civic Organizing & Education***

#### **Objectives:**

- Public confidence and participation in the election process are increased
- Ethnic Serb and Croat citizens are informed about electoral issues, their rights as citizens of Croatia and the process of reintegration in eastern Slavonia

With NDI assistance, GONG played a central role in informing the electorate on the technical and political issues surrounding Croatia's 1997 local, House of Counties and Presidential elections. In addition, through election monitoring training, GONG equipped 1200 citizens to determine the fairness of the elections for themselves. Roughly 700 GONG volunteers turned out to monitor both sets of elections throughout Croatia, marking an important step in fostering citizen ownership of their own electoral processes.

As Zoran Pusic, one of GONG's Project Coordinators, commented, "Democracy is a difficult plant to sow... by training GONG, NDI has played the important role of gardener to plant seeds and ensure that democracy will flourish." Following a pre-election town meeting organized by a GONG member in Vukovar, an ethnic Serb who initially stated that she would not apply for Croatian documents had changed her mind, recognizing that her human rights would not be protected without Croatian citizenship. Her change in attitude highlights the type of positive impact NDI's voter education campaign had on the population of eastern Slavonia.

By involving local organizations in the process of producing materials for the 1997 elections, NDI's voter education work laid the foundation for a more general post-election civic organizing program.

**Objective:**

- Citizens in eastern Slavonia are equipped with the confidence, knowledge and skills to organize civic initiatives in their communities.
- NDI's Civic Forums provided more than 250 residents with information regarding the reintegration process and equipped them with the skills and confidence to participate in civic life.

If Croatia is to develop democratic institutions, its citizens must be willing and able participate actively in the political process. The results of NDI's participant survey and focus groups at the end of the program, when compared to those conducted at the beginning, indicate that Civic Forum significantly increased participants' knowledge of democratic principles and the structure and function of Croatian government institutions, as well as influenced positively their attitudes toward political involvement. At the end of the curriculum, participants were 17 percent more likely to say they could identify when news stories are based on opinion rather than fact; 23 percent more likely to say they had an excellent or good understanding of how laws are made; and 25 percent less likely to say that they can have no influence on local government than at the beginning of the program.

Furthermore, 91 percent of the respondents said they would recommend the Civic Forum program to family and friends, and 76 percent were interested in continuing their involvement with Civic Forum by becoming actively involved in a community organizing initiative. The strategic plans developed by all of the groups during their last discussion sessions not only demonstrated their strong understanding of organizing principles, but also testified to the field coordinators' abilities to impart knowledge and facilitate discussions effectively.

Statements made by participants during discussion sessions further indicate the program's success. Following a series of sessions involving both ethnic Serbs and Croats, a participant commented: "We are for mutual existence regardless of everything we have gone through in the past, but if you had asked that question five months ago (before the Civic Forum program began), I would not have said so." Another participant acknowledged, "We need a lot of meetings like this in the future because they help us to realize that the problems we have are the same for both returnees and [Serb] residents."

NDI succeeded in encouraging more than half of its groups to implement community organizing initiatives in an effort to solve local problems. As only six percent of respondents to NDI's baseline questionnaire said they would "try to organize people" when a problem occurs in their community, this figure represents significant progress. Through its community organizing program, NDI has instilled a sense of hope among residents of eastern Slavonia. During one discussion session, a Vukovar participant said, "Self-organizing is currently the only way for us to fight for our future."

Considering the dearth of NGOs operating in eastern Slavonia, NDI contributed to the sustained growth of civil society by encouraging Civic Forum to continue after NDI's departure. The local staff's decision to create a Croatian NGO indicates that NDI training increased both their confidence and skills, and has created an environment that stimulates professional growth and independence.

## **LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

### **Objective:**

- *Local government officials use techniques to encourage citizen participation in local affairs and incorporate public input into decision-making.*

Members of the working groups NDI brought together in Pula and Osijek were equipped to develop and test issue-based communication strategies, as well as moderate roundtable discussions



on local issues involving diverse political and civic actors. City officials developed workplans and timelines for their outreach activities and working groups designed and conducted surveys to gauge public opinion on city initiatives before they were implemented. Productive and respectful interaction among participants at roundtables organized by each working group demonstrated that these cities made great strides in bringing diverse local players closer to mutual understanding and a readiness to work together in addressing community issues.

The program gave city officials and numerous citizens and civil organizations in Osijek and Pula substantial experience with a variety of techniques for constructive engagement on local issues. NDI developed linkages and resource materials to support continued use of these techniques in Osijek, Pula and elsewhere. High levels of participation indicate that the program successfully addressed a need among local officials for help in representing and engaging their constituents.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

While the transition to a genuine, multiparty democracy is a slow and arduous process, notable progress has been achieved in Croatia since 1994. NDI has played a role in the development of increasingly responsive political parties and a civil society willing to engage in local and national affairs. The overwhelming dominance of an autocratic ruling party continues to plague the democratic development of Croatia and contribute to voter apathy and distrust of institutions, but the likelihood for change in the political landscape is high as Croatia faces its next parliamentary elections.

NDI has been able to achieve its success by maintaining maximum programmatic flexibility and responding to needs as they are perceived and articulated by the Institute's program partners. One example of this approach was NDI's willingness to focus initially on the local level in political party building, rather than an insistence on working with national level leaders. This was a result of the sincere interest and need expressed by local activists and the greater political space that manifested itself at that level. Success stories resulting from training at the local level were later key in ensuring party leaders' buy-in to NDI's technical assistance program. Positive program results can also be attributed to the Institute's relentless focus on processes, rather than political outcomes. This philosophy has contributed to NDI's development of relationships with program partners from across the political spectrum, and will continue to inform the Institute's efforts in promoting a true democratic transition in Croatia.

The common thread running throughout NDI's programming initiatives in this period has been an effort to enhance the ability of Croatia's transitioning political system to respond to the interests of the citizens of Croatia. Political parties have begun to grasp that consulting with voters during and between elections is the key, not only to promoting a positive political image, but also to presenting a solid and relevant policy alternative that can translate to electoral success. And local government officials in Pula and Osijek have experienced first hand the advantages of public

consultation in the development of public policy. Likewise, citizens have been encouraged to express their needs and priorities through participation in political processes, and have met with some success in utilizing new organizing skills.

**Appendices**  
**CROATIA: POLITICAL PARTY BUILDING, LOCAL GOVERNANCE**  
**AND CIVIC FORUM PROGRAMS**  
**USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00**  
**April 1995 to June 1998**

1. NDI Pre-Election Assessment Report, October 1995
2. NDI Pre-Election Statement, April 1997
3. GONG Preliminary Report of the Presidential Elections, June 1997
4. NDI Political Party Training Guide, “Keeping in Touch With Your Voters Year Round”